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ABSTRACT

Written to meet four objectives, this document (1) reviews the use of media in parent education, (2) evaluates the format and content of existing approaches, (3) formulates a philosophy to guide the development of new materials, and (4) makes specific recommendations regarding future parent education materials. Specific recommendations concerning the form and content of parent education materials are linked to the philosophy that human development and experience occur interactively within an interdependent community and that such a viewpoint should guide developers of parent education materials. Various audiovisual materials are judged to lack a specific focus and/or to lack sophisticated presentation; among the authors' recommendations is the suggestion that viewpoints regarding child development and parenting underlying materials be made more recognizable to consumers. A review of materials notes that the traditional focus within parent education has been on promoting mental health and cognitive development. Current parent education materials emphasize child rearing and parental responsibility in establishing guidelines for children's acceptable behavior; recent research investigates the outcomes for the increasing numbers of children placed in alternate child care by working women. (Author/DB)

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The Family Learning Project - Phase I

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Project Report, July 1980
Elaine Heffner
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I. OBJECTIVES

In a period when communication delivery systems designed to bring information of all kinds directly into the home are so rapidly proliferating, the opportunity exists to develop a variety of materials that can strengthen, nourish and enrich family life. The purpose of this study has been to lay the foundation for the future development of such materials, to be directed toward parents of pre-school age children. To this end our objectives have included:

1. An examination of the state of the art: i.e. existing use of the media to communicate information to parents, what is being communicated, how it is being communicated.

2. An evaluation of the potentials and limitations of existing approaches, format as well as content.

3. The formulation of a philosophy or point of view to guide the creation of new materials.

4. The formulation of specific recommendations regarding content and format for the future development of informational materials.

II. APPROACH

The electronic media are only the most recent tool of communication to be used in what has been an ongoing effort to give information to parents. In considering how best to approach the development of materials for these newest media, it is relevant, therefore, to examine not only the media themselves, but also the nature of other efforts to inform parents. The questions that need to be addressed relate to the information that is to be communicated, the form in which it is to be communicated, and the relationship, if any, between the two. Are we seeking simply to communicate a fixed body of information in a new way, or is the information itself changing as well as the means of transmission? Further, does the mode of communication in any way influence the information to be given, and, if so, how?

Content

Two kinds of information have been disseminated to parents: one kind purports to be factual information about child development; the second consists of advice to parents on how best to raise children. These two kinds of information are often closely intertwined in that the advice given to parents is directed toward implementing the "facts" about child development. Both kinds of information seek to influence the attitudes and behavior of parents toward a given end, namely, the achievement of desired characteristics or behavior of children. Materials

for parents, then, tend to include information about children, advice on how to translate this information into child rearing practices, and an underlying point of view about the end result to be sought.

It is clear that throughout this century there have been at various periods prevailing theories that have dominated child development information and advice disseminated to parents, and have influenced child-rearing practices. These theories have been based on research studies and clinical findings, and have been set forth by the professional "experts" of the period: physicians, educators, psychologists and psychiatrists. As a result, a technology of child rearing has evolved in this country which lays claim to having a scientific base. Information turns into prescription and parents are instructed that certain behavior on their part will ensure or avoid certain outcomes in their children.

Despite the presumed scientific basis for recommended child-rearing practices, child development theory and research are, in fact, shaped in large measure by contemporary social attitudes, concerns and conditions. The social climate appears to dictate what is needed or desired in the child-product and the professionals set about evolving a theory and method for achieving it. Or to put it another way, the agenda formulated by the professional in child development terms, stems in part from a perception of an

agenda in society.

Clearly, the content of materials developed for parents reflects an agenda shaped by changing social values as well as new scientific findings in child development. In order to evaluate existing informational materials and to identify appropriate content for future materials, the basic questions to be answered are: What is the agenda? Whose agenda is it? For whom is the agenda intended? The following steps were taken in an effort to answer these questions:

1. A survey of the popular literature for parents.

2. A review of contemporary scientific investigation into various aspects of child development.

3. Discussions with professionals involved in current research or who are part of the academic, scientific and foundation communities that influence opinion and policy.

4. Discussions with people in government who reflect pressure being brought to bear in the formulation of public policy.

5. Visits to programs for parents. Discussions with those people who are serving parents in a variety of ways and who are developing resources in response to identified parental needs.

6. Discussions with parents and parent groups in order to learn what parents themselves are experiencing

in their parental role, what they perceive their needs to be, what kinds of materials they would consider useful or responsive to their needs.

Media

Information for parents has been disseminated through the print media in the form of books, articles and pamphlets; through interpersonal communication such as lectures, meetings and discussion groups; through the audio-visual media such as film and most recently television. A survey has been made of all three forms of communication with particular emphasis on the electronic media. The focus has been on identifying the extent to which these media are being used for parent information, the nature of the content and the assets and pitfalls to be found in existing audio-visual techniques of conveying information.

III. FINDINGS

Contemporary informational materials for parents reflect the two agendas that have dominated parent education since the 1930's. There is growing evidence that a third is unfolding. The first agenda is to promote the mental health of the child; the second is to promote cognitive development. The third has not yet taken form but relates to the still unanswered question of who will be doing the child rearing in the coming decades. In an examination of existing materials it is possible to identify the way in which these underlying objectives, or points of view about what is desirable in children, influence both the child development information and child-rearing advice given to parents.

Content

Central to all information about children is the concept of stages or phases of development. As presented to parents, there are three aspects to this concept: the level of skills the child can be expected to have attained at each stage, the kinds of behavior that are typical at each stage, and recommended parental responses to bring about desired results in either skills or behavior. In effect, parents are given developmental norms against which they may measure their own children and their own competence as parents. The intention, however, is also to enable parents to understand better the behavior of their children so that they may respond to them more effectively.

In materials for parents, this body of information is generally organized either chronologically or thematically, that is, according to the child's age or around specific behaviours or concerns of parents such as thumb sucking, toilet training or discipline. In either kind of presentation the underlying objective is the critical factor, in the selection of, and emphasis on, particular facts of child development, and in recommendations made for parental behavior.

Mental health as the objective of child rearing, reached its peak during the 1940's and '50's. This was the period of the baby boom following World War II; a period when home and family were highly valued; a period which nurtured what has come to be known as the "feminine mystique", namely, the injunction to women to invest themselves in motherhood. It was also a period of increasing affluence and retreat from social concerns; a society ready for a philosophy of individual self-realization and for the pursuit of happiness. The mental health objective in child rearing embodied all of this and sought to correct in the children of that period the ills of development that had befallen the parent generation.

Information derived from this period reflects the influence of psychoanalytic theories of personality development and clinical findings relating to emotional maladjustment. As presented to parents, the focus is on

the emotional growth of the child: the needs of the child at each stage that must be met by the parents to insure that growth, recommended parental behavior to promote such growth, and, finally, prohibitions to parents about responses on their part that would cause detrimental effects to the child. For example, information pertaining to the first stage of development places special emphasis on the infant's need to suck, advises parents to provide opportunity for ample sucking and warns parents that frustrating the need to suck may cause later personality disturbances. This kind of information has led to a number of consequences: an excessive preoccupation with the needs of the child, an exagerated feeling of responsibility for a child's behavior, self-blame on the part of parents and consequent feelings of guilt over problems in development. In addition, the dual emphasis on the normality of needs and the dangers of frustration has left parents confused as to how to respond to behaviors they find objectionable. The idea that behavior is normal for a given stage has been interpreted to mean that it is acceptable. Parents have come to feel that they must either tolerate such behavior or respond in ways that will be damaging to the child. The result has been a major preoccupation with the subject of discipline.

More recent materials for parents have attempted to correct some of the negative effects created by informa-

tion based on personality theory. Newer materials stress parental responsibility in establishing guidelines for appropriate behavior. There is a large body of material devoted to instructing parents in various techniques of getting children to behave in desired ways without damaging their personality development. However, there has been little effort made to clarify for parents the basis of their concerns, or the issues involved in their attempts to resolve them. Despite modifications in specific content, what remains of the mental health agenda is the idea that parents are responsible for emotional adjustment, that they can bring about specific outcomes through their own behavior, that there are special techniques to be used for this end, and that parents are to blame when things go wrong.

If the mental health agenda related to the emotional adjustment of the child, the agenda that followed in the 1960's and '70's related to what Kenneth Keniston calls the "intellectualization of the child". To quote Keniston further : "I believe that we are witnessing a growing emphasis upon the child as a brain, upon the cultivation of narrowly defined cognitive skill and abilities..." Although the impetus for this development was attributed to the demands of an increasingly technological society with its need for scientific achievements, it was stimulated in particular by the "great society" philosophy

of the '60's and its "war against poverty."

While the mental health agenda was directed at middle and upper class parents, the cognitive development agenda was directed at "culturally deprived" mothers. It was a response to the growing social awareness of the period that children of poverty were unequal to middle class children in school success and therefore in their ability to compete successfully in the market place later in life. A theory was formulated which held that culturally deprived children begin school in an unequal condition due to the absence of appropriate stimulation at home. The agenda for parent education was to teach poverty mothers how to stimulate their children and maximize their cognitive development. One unhappy side effect of this plan was that its impact was greatest on middle-class mothers (whose children were all made to watch Sesame Street) and they avidly took on cognitive development in addition to emotional adjustment as their mandate for child rearing.

As information geared to emotional development was influenced by psychoanalytic findings, information based on cognitive development has been influenced by the studies of research psychologists. If the former is symbolized by the writings of Benjamin Spock, the latter is epitomized by Burton White. Information for parents is again presented in terms of stages in development, but here the emphasis is on the abilities of the child, his capacity for learning at

each stage, and the responsibility of the parent to provide the kind of input at each stage that will maximize the child's potential to develop skills in all areas, his intellectual growth in particular. In this approach the parent is presented as a teacher and is given an active role in fostering development. In earlier mental health materials, the child's development is portrayed as unfolding naturally if not damaged or interfered with by repressive child-rearing methods. The newer approach presents the child as having innate abilities that will grow and develop only if properly stimulated and responded to by the parents. Again using the first stage of life as an example, this view emphasizes the infant's capacity to respond to visual and auditory stimuli, as well as the role of such stimuli in the child's learning, and tells parents which materials and methods of interacting with the child will provide those stimuli. Information for parents based on cognitive development differs from the mental health agenda in that it values different characteristics in the child. However, it is similar in that it is child focused, holds the parent responsible for the child's development and carries the implicit judgment that the parent is to blame for the child's failures. A major effect of such information on parents has been a preoccupation with cognitive skills at ever earlier ages as a measure of success -- their own as well as their children's. Such a focus often acts to the

detriment of other aspects of development, leaving parents confused and guilty.

It is clear that existing information for parents, no matter what its underlying viewpoint, makes the explicit or implicit demand that a major portion of parental time and energy be devoted to child rearing. Theories of child development with attending recommendations for parents all point to significant parental involvement in order to arrive at a successful outcome. Yet statistics from current research, such as the study called "American Families" just completed by the Harvard-MIT Joint Center for Urban Studies, show that growing numbers of mothers with preschool children now work. The predicitions are that this is a trend which will continue.

As a result of this trend, there is at present an intense, wide-spread debate over whether working mothers can still fulfill the mothering role for their children. At one end of the opinion spectrum is the attitude that mothers of infants and young children, who work full time, actually forfeit their mothering role to the principal caretaker of their child. Those who study mother-child diads and form learning theories based on their observations, contend that the first three years of life are so crucial for the child's cognitive development, as well as for his emotional stability, that the mother's total attention and time is needed for her child's maximum development. At

the other end of the spectrum is the group that contends it is the quality, not the quantity of time the mother spends with her infant or pre-schooler that counts. Between these extremes is the idea that the mother needs a substantial amount of "protected time" with her infant for his best interest and hers. While this is a serious requirement, it does not necessarily preclude work out of the home for the mother.

Now, as in the past, research studies in child development are being used as the basis of advice to parents on the desirability of various child-rearing practices. At the moment, however, these studies point in opposite directions and are serving to intensify the conflict women are experiencing with regard to their maternal role. Perhaps because of the unresolved nature of this conflict, current information for parents is heavily focused on pregnancy and the neo-natal period. A woman's pregnancy and the early months after childbirth are not at issue and therefore not as emotionally laden as the question later as to whether she should return to work. Information about childbirth seems "safe", free of the debate over maternal role.

Yet even such information is invariably based on a point of view about what is good in children and leads inevitably in a specific direction. For example, much information today is aimed at creating a particular childbirth atmosphere and involves the move toward midwifery,

birthing rooms in hospitals and home births. These procedures are advocated in part to promote bonding between mother and child, and derive from the work of Kennell and Klaus among others. Studies show that increased opportunity for mothers to be close to their newborns stimulates the attachment between them; this increased early contact leads to a reduction of later mothering disorders and to babies who cry less, smile more, and have more rapid cognitive development. Women appear to be sold on this idea based on the information that it is "good for the baby." The paradox, however, is that women who expect to return to work are using childbirth methods that will promote attachment to their children and are thereby intensifying their own potential for conflict and distress.

The attempt to resolve conflicts about child rearing both for women and society at large, has led to a major concern with alternative child care. Perhaps because of our recent history of child-focused child rearing, information about this issue is presented in terms of what will damage, or what is good for children. There are some studies that seem to suggest that good day care has child rearing results that are better than home care. For example, Irving Lazaar at Cornell University describes a study which demonstrates that good day care is good for children. Findings show that the day care children "are more cooperative, less fussy, less fearful, more verbal, not introverted,

interact better with peers, less averse to dirt, and their mothers interact more with them than home reared children." The assumption here is that these are the most important things for children to be learning at this stage in their lives.

An as yet unpublished study by Alison Clarke-Stewart correlates the behavior of children with the type of child care received, on a scale from total maternal care to total day care. Preliminary analysis shows more social behaviors in day care children. Such children are more cooperative i.e. better at taking turns, working on projects with peers, and are more interested in other people. The children in this study were rated by observers who were asked among other things, to identify the children they would like to take home. There was a high correlation between the children picked and day care. Studies of this kind are being used to prove that day care as an alternative to maternal care represents a positive good for children. Here, too, the underlying assumption is that early social behavior is desirable, and there is little attention to what else we value that might be sacrificed in the process.

The whole question of who will raise young children and how, is not generally being discussed in terms of the plusses and minuses inherent in the variety of possible child rearing arrangements. Instead, the issue has been politicized by pressure from the women's movement

for government supported day care, and information is being used in support of one or another position. In fact, advocacy is an important theme in current information for parents and draws on the concept of "parenting in an unresponsive society." This point of view encourages parents to look outside of themselves in order to understand the difficulties they are facing, to identify the failures of society to support parents in their role, and to become politically active in pursuit of such support.

It is still an open question which viewpoint, if any, will be effective in influencing public policy with regard to child care. In private conversation, some researchers acknowledge that current research is being designed to show the positives for child development in day care. There is a feeling of pessimism in many quarters about alternative solutions, based on the belief that our society is not geared to provide benefits for women who stay home to raise children since this role is not highly enough valued. Some groups are looking toward corporate responsibility and involvement in such solutions as on-the-job child care facilities, flex-time, time off for fathers as well as mothers and other kinds of supports for family life. Still another research trend is to look at human development over a broader time frame and thereby take the pressure off the early years of life as the determinants of ultimate outcome. None of these inputs, however, has

been decisive in shaping a dominant viewpoint for child rearing in the coming decade.

In the meantime, existing materials for parents do not address their deepest concerns and often reinforce their conflicts. An unpublished study by the Erikson Institute, of information being given to parents in the popular women's magazines, suggests that such information is focused on the physical needs of children, how to be an advocating parent, how to pick a school, and instructs mothers to "trust your own impulses" about everything else. A further conclusion is that "supermom" is alive and well, capable of having job, husband, baby and succeeding at all three. In fact, women increasingly are becoming convinced that such is not the case, and are seeking clarification and support in establishing priorities.

Discussions with those who work with parents, and mothers themselves, in many parts of the country, reveal a number of common themes. There is a strong wish to do what is best for one's children but considerable confusion about what that means or how to accomplish it. As a result, parents experience a great deal of anxiety about whether they are doing a good job. There is a hunger on the part of women to feel a sense of professionalism in motherhood. This is especially true of women who have delayed child rearing in order to start a career. But it is also true of many other owmen who are seeking ways to legitimize

their wish to stay home -- at least for a time -- and raise their children without feeling that they are "selling out" their new found freedom. Finally, there is a need for an emotional support system to help parents deal with the anxiety they feel about their competence as parents and the feelings aroused by child care. To answer the wish for professionalism and the need for support, a major trend around the country is the development of parents self-help groups. Many such groups express a distrust and disenchantment with professionals and existing information for parents as promoting guilt and failing to meet their needs. However, in attempting to develop their own curriculum and materials, they often unwittingly adopt the agenda of others.

Media

The audio-visual media are like the print media in reflecting prevailing trends in parent education and child-rearing practices. There appear to be certain problems, however, that are specific to the use of the electronic media for communication. The most striking of these is the split between the technology and the message. There appears to be a lack in understanding how to use audio-visual media to teach about child development and parent concerns. The Footsteps series and some of Alvin Fiering's films are among the few exceptions.

In simplified terms, there are two general formats that don't work. In one, the message is clear but gets no

help from the media. Films such as the EDC Brazelton neonatal assessment scales look like home movies. The material is fascinating, but carries the whole weight of the communication with no help from the superior technology now available. The other format common among educational films on young children is one in which media technique is excellent, but is not used in such a way as to communicate the message intended. There are films made by good camera men using top quality equipment in which the cameramen, and therefore their films, lack a point of view. Visual material that needs organization as much as a written essay, is left more or less formless. As a result, neither the viewer's eye or mind is focused. Some films try to correct this by adding a bland, often preachy overvoice, as in "Mainstreaming Techniques." This overvoice has added pitfalls demonstrated by McGraw Hill's "Child" series where there are occasions when the overvoice and the action simply don't match.

Depending on an overvoice is not the worst that can happen when the media and the message aren't skillfully meshed. The medium can not only fail to serve the message, it can actually confuse it by selection and juxtaposition of images. The result is often hidden messages not on the agenda of those whose purpose is to communicate specific ideas and information. For example, in the visually beautiful Time-Life film, "Rock-a-bye Baby", you are left with a

frightening sequence of associations surely not intended. Starting with the importance of mother/infant interactions, the film, with the Harlow monkey studies, moves on to maternal deprivation, resulting atypical behaviors, violence and lobotomy.

The hidden message is a particular danger in the dramatic format where storyline and character portrayal invite identification and judgments by the viewer. Often the story ends up making a different point than was stated. In the Footsteps TV series' "Queen for a Day", the stated theme is a child's need to assert his or her identity. The unstated message, however, is that children are paying the price for social changes such as working mothers. A further message is that with two working parents it is the mother who gives up her chance for a by-line in order to meet her child's needs. These are important questions for parents to consider, but the existing format does not invite or allow for such consideration.

At the present time the ability of parents to use audio-visual materials for their own information is severely limited. Films are next to impossible for an individual to obtain. They are difficult to locate and expensive to rent, not to mention the need for projection facilities in order to see them. Television, both public and commercial, is just beginning to program for parents, and like TV programming generally, is uneven: superb at its best, unbe-

lievably bad at its worst. The new Phil Donahue series, "Look At Me", attempts to use some of the Sesame Street techniques such as puppets and attention getting devices. The result is programs that are a jumble and appear to be directed at children rather than their parents. Although two of the consultants on this series represent the best input in the Chicago area, they were involved only to the point of being shown scripts. Discussions with them revealed great embarrassment on their part about the outcome.

The most promising development on the horizon is the explosion of cable facilities with their demand for materials and limitless opportunity to provide viewers with many kinds of materials. At the moment, cable systems such as Qube have both an instructional, courses-for-credit channel as well as a channel for more general informational materials. There appears to be room here for innovation and experimentation.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

There are a number of conclusions to be drawn from our survey of existing information for parents:

1. All child rearing theories have as their goal a certain kind of child. The very concept of child development implies movement toward a particular end: namely, the adult person. The characteristics of personality and behavior deemed important by society at any given time influence our concept of the "good" child. The kind of child rearing recommended is directed at cultivating particular characteristics in the child, and later in the adult. The problem is that while this is a question of values, it is presented to parents as a matter of fact.

This is well illustrated by the unfolding agenda of the 1980's. A profound change in our society is that mothers will no longer be available as primary caretakers. The only viable alternative appears to be that children in increasing numbers will be cared for in some form of group setting. Since the human species is adaptive it is not surprising that children develop early the social skills that enable them to survive and flourish in such a setting. These skills are then valued because they meet the needs of the kind of society that is evolving. Researchers find that day care (as an example) fosters social behaviors and parents are told that day care is good for children. A new "fact" has been added to child develop-

ment information, but this "fact" has less to do with children than with the reorganization of our social system. Perhaps this is part of an evolutionary process necessary for the survival of a society, but if parents are to be truly informed they need to be made aware of the values implicit in the choices they make for themselves and their children. It is only in this way that they can be participants in shaping their children's future.

2. Values influence norms. To continue our former example, if early social skills are valued the child who develops these skills more slowly, or who is less social, is considered deviant. This creates a feeling of failure in the parent and produces increasing pressure on the child to conform to the social norm. The question arises as to whether our emerging child-rearing methods will allow for a broad range of individual differences in development and if we can continue to value a variety of human characteristics. These are questions that need to be raised as part of informational materials provided for parents.

3. Information about children is not adequately differentiated from prescriptions for parental response. This is largely because so much information is presented in terms of children's needs. If babies need stimulation, parents are told it is "good" for them to receive it and

are instructed in the method of providing it. The implication is first, that to be a "good" parent one must do what is prescribed as "good" for the baby, and second, that there is a "right way" to do it. This approach creates anxiety in parents about whether they are adequately meeting their child's needs and narrows the focus of their attention to specific behaviors instead of freeing them to interact spontaneously with their child. Finally, the connection made between children's needs and parental responses suggests that the parent does and should have a high degree of responsibility for and control over the outcome in their child. Parents feel it is their fault if the prescription doesn't work.

4. Much of the information for parents does not help them feel successful. There appear to be several reasons for this. One is that the negative feelings aroused by the behavior of children are rarely addressed or clarified. Parents often believe that "bad" feelings make them "bad" parents. Secondly, too often those who provide information are attempting to use the parent to carry out their own goals and ideas. Parents are not helped to function independently -- to become autonomous -- but are left in the position of attempting to implement advice that may have little to do with their own aims or values. Finally, success most often derives from the

freedom both to experiment and to fail. The prescriptive nature of the information parents receive and the feeling of responsibility for the outcome, interfere with such freedom.

5. The audio-visual media in particular are vulnerable to the communication of hidden messages and to distortions of content. Those interested in providing educational and supportive services to parents through the audio-visual media cannot be successful by simply acting as consultants. They must follow the material to completion, either as producers or as fully involved members of a team that believes not only in the importance of the content, but also in the power of the media to facilitate or distort.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

We are interested in designing audio-visual materials for parents that will "nurture the nurturers", to use a phrase from T. Berry Brazelton. To accomplish this goal, such materials should add to parents' knowledge about their children and themselves, enable them to formulate their own values and purposes, and thereby instill a feeling of confidence in their own competence as parents.

As we have indicated, all information stems from a point of view. It is important that our own point of view be made clear and open for discussion, and that we avoid hidden messages -- either intended or unintended. Our materials will be based on the concept of an interdependent human community and will seek to illuminate the interactive nature of human development and experience.

Content

First it is important to identify what is actually known through direct observation about infants and young children, and generally accepted to be true. That infants can see more than just a shadow at birth is an example of a generally accepted piece of information. It is also important to identify theories of growth and development: those theories based on serious study, those based on cultural bias and those that are largely personal prejudice. Information about child development will be presented free of suggested parental interventions and advice about parental responses. The approach will be to help parents know more

about what children are like, rather than to instruct them in children's needs. We will be identifying the wants, feelings and learning patterns of other human beings with whom parents live and about whom they care deeply.

There is a steadily growing body of knowledge about infants drawn from direct observation and follow-up studies. This research has changed our perception of infants by giving us new information about how they actually function in mind and body, what they see, what they hear and what they do. The research studies of such people as Daniel Stern, Peter Wolfe, John H. Kennell and T. Berry Brazelton, have helped us identify the infant's capacity for partnership with a primary caretaker. The newborn infant's ability to interact has been observed and richly recorded in research films such as Dr. Stern's mother-infant studies. This observed partnership between infant and mother changes in the deepest way our old view of babies as passive receivers. Infants also have something to give, and apparently the experience of reciprocity plays an important part in emotional, social, cognitive and even physical growth.

What this new information about human infants may utlimately mean for our child-rearing practices and to our society remains to be seen. But if carried from our behavior with infants into our relations with toddlers and older children, it might mean a move away from the confrontation and power struggles between parents and children that grow in part out of our old idea that learning must be im-

posed from the outside. One way to find out just how important our new knowledge can be, is to share it with all new parents in a way that will increase their interest in and enjoyment of their newborn infants and that will help them to have this experience of partnership with their baby from the very beginning.

Most people would agree that children want physical, social and emotional security. They want protection, help in being acceptable to their parents and their society, and they want affection. We might add to this list that children want their parents' approval and respect. They want to learn from their parents. They want to please their parents. Or, put in terms of sociobiology, children want to survive.

In addition to learning from their parent or care giver, children want the opportunity to explore and create, to follow their own interests. Children, in a sense, have their own business with the world. They have a drive to explore and experiment, and plans about how to do this which are worthy of our attention and respect. What this means for parents is that they are not responsible for all of their child's learning. Every child is able to and wants to take a great deal of responsibility for his or her own learning. Children are neither empty receptacles, nor blank pages, but are interacting organisms from birth.

Children have a full gamut of emotions. They feel rage, love, fear, frustration, irritation, impatience, boredome, disappointment, pride, grief, loneliness, helplessness,

hopelessness, happiness and joy as they move through the preschool years. It is important to recognize these feelings and their connection to the resulting behavior that children exhibit such as wild excitement and laughter, tears and tantrums, or withdrawn and silent periods. Often it is possible to understand what caused the feelings. But whether the causes are known or not, parents respond to the behaviors according to whether they want to encourage or discourage them. If they are not sure or don't care, that, too, results in a response. In any case, the nature and quality of these responses is a central area for discussion and awareness. When problems arise in teaching desired behavior and in communication between parent and child, they are usually generated by feelings, which are of intense concern, therefore, to both children and their parents.

Children learn by imitation, repetition and experimentation. While learning the tasks of each developmental stage, children progress unevenly. Mastery takes time and repetition. It is now generally understood that there is a wide spectrum of maturational timing that lies within the norm, that there are different types of infants, and that personal styles must also be considered. The point we would emphasize is that every child, while following general developmental paths, learns in ways that are different from every other child.

Also, children learn all the time from their en-

vironment. As Marilyn M. Smith puts it, "Children's minds, at least in the beginning, do not have an on and off button like the light in the refrigerator." There is no fear that "...their minds will stay turned off until we open the door with a planned intellectual experience." So parents need not feel that they have to acquire special techniques and expensive toys, or that they must make complicated plans to stimulate their child's learning.

The environment is rich in opportunities for parent and child. It is in the minutia of daily living, which often seems so agonizingly repetitious and uninspiring to new mothers, that the greatest learning and teaching opportunities exist. The minutia of daily routines are the transmitters of values. It is in the exchanges that take place around child care and home making that children can begin to learn about the subtler human experiences such as empathy, intimacy, negotiation and social problem solving.

In terms of the physical environment, children are learning to use their senses. It is more important to see, hear, touch, smell and taste than to learn the alphabet, since it is on this sensual base that all capacity for intelligent thought must rest. Children love symbols and will move rapidly enough towards them. But without a real knowledge of the apple, the A will have no flavor.

We would seek ways to sharpen parents' awareness

of the value of what they are doing when they let their toddler stand on a chair at the sink to wash the fruit, or answer his questions, and ways to enhance parents' pleasure as they enrich their children's enjoyment and knowledge of the world. Raising a young child is like having an enthusiastic foreigner around one's own beloved places. Every parent has that opportunity with their child.

If we focus on observations of the processes of infant maturation, and resist applying judgments or giving advice to parents, the behavior of preschool children can show us what they want, what they feel and what they are learning. This can be invaluable information for the parent. As an illustration, here is a sample of three year old behavior observed in a child study center.

Two children were rocking in a rocking boat in close enjoyment, making eye contact, laughing and helping each other rock. A third child stood several yards away with a small mop. After watching for a few seconds he walked over to tap first one child and then the other on the head with his mop. This produced loud screams of protest mixed with laughter. The boy with the mop ran away since the screams were ones of protest, but all three children were smiling. After about a minute, he reappeared. This time when he tapped the first child there was a different result. That boy didn't laugh or scream. Instead, he grabbed the mop, vigorously trying to get it

away. The smile left the face of the child with the mop. However, he managed to hold onto it and moved over to tap the other child on the head. The girl let out a communicative whine of protest, but did not even turn around to look. So the mop boy left and didn't return. Instead, he stood in the doorway of the adjoining room, isolated and unsmiling. A little girl started to move past him. He waved the mop at her, making a threatening face. However, he made no attempt to touch her. She ran away, then turned back from a safe distance to stare. The mop boy put the handle of the mop in his mouth. Holding it there, he moved off towards the teacher as though to get help, comfort, or both.

Before getting into a discussion of what an adult could or should do about this child's behavior three questions can be asked: What did he want? What did he feel? What did he learn? Although interpretations of behavior are subjective, one could say that the boy with the mop wanted to be recognized and responded to by his peers. He felt disappointed by the results of his efforts. He learned that hitting with the mop did not get him connected to others in any lasting or pleasurable way. Whatever your conclusions, they would influence the way you would teach him to live more successfully with his peers.

One might also call this behavior bad, anti-social, or aggressive. This would reflect other adult values that might be considered crucial. But if the goal was to help

a preschool child develop social skills, it would be more effective to address the real concerns of the child. Whatever the values or personal style of the parent, greater understanding of the meaning of preschool children's behavior can lead to greater success in achieving adult goals.

In attempting to help parents learn what their children are like, it is crucial that we keep in mind what parents are like: What do they want? What do they feel? How do they learn?

Parents want their children to be successful in mastering the various developmental tasks before them. At the same time, they want their children to behave in ways that they as parents, and that those close to them find acceptable. They are made anxious by, and worry about many of the behaviors of children that are expressions of the maturational process. While educators would like parents to understand these behaviors, parents are looking for ways to "do something" about the behavior. Most often the judgments parents make of children's behavior are supported by the social environment in which they live. It is very difficult for a parent to see things from a child's point of view when as a parent, one is held responsible for the child's behavior.

Parents learn best in the same way that children learn best: by starting where they are. To help parents learn the child's point of view, we must begin with their

point of view as parents: what are their objectives for their children, what are their hopes, their angers and frustrations. It is only when parents feel understood, when their own experience is given validity, that they can move on to consider the experience of their children.

Our goal is to provide a forum for both points of view -- parents' and children's, and to demonstrate that it is in the interaction of these two points of view that learning and development take place.

Media

Since we want the media to serve our purpose, not subvert it, we propose to begin with a fairly simple format. Each program will have two parts and will begin with a film or films concerning children. These films will be of infants and children interacting with their human and physical environment. Each film will be approximately three minutes in length. A small group of parents will watch the film along with the home audience and will then participate in a discussion of what they have seen. The group discussion will be led by a trained group leader with a broad knowledge of child development and parental concerns. This format can be tried in half hour and hour units.

Our goals will be:

1. To teach child development through the films

and the discussions they stimulate.

2. To provide a forum for airing and clarifying the feelings aroused by the behavior of children.

3. To help parents become aware of the role their own goals and values play in their responses to their children.

The films shown will focus on the interactions of infants and young children with their parents, with other adults, with the physical environment and with each other. We would present these interactions as short, audio-visual vignettes. They would be naturalistic rather than acted. The boy with the mop is an example of a possible vignette. Each one would form a small dramatic whole having some kind of suspense and resolution, surprise, or clearly demonstrated point. They would be intimate vignettes showing small events and small concrete details. They would reflect the characteristic minutia of living with young children: what children are actually like as they interact with their surroundings.

This material would enable us to teach child development in a non-didactic fashion through consideration and discussion of familiar child behaviors. The vignettes would be chosen specifically to provoke discussion among the parents in the studio.

As well as provoking meaningful discussion among parents, the interaction vignettes would enable us to use

the media to serve the content in other more purely technical ways. For instance, vivid close-ups of concrete objects, particularly familiar objects, are visually attention getting. Also, interactions are inherently dramatic and hold attention if well chosen. So, too, the clothes and artifacts surrounding preschool children tend to be in clear, bright colors that catch the eye and give pleasure. And, of course, for most people pictures of babies and children entertain.

Within this format of short films and discussion we will be trying out a number of ideas. For example, in order to make the program as responsive as possible to parent interests we might slowly collect a library of these short interactions. The home audience could refer back to them by phone or mail, asking for a rerun. Likewise, the participants in a discussion group could be reminded of a vignette they had previously seen and request it on the spot as relevant to their discussion. Since the interaction films will be for the most part under three minutes, both of these options should be possible.

In addition, we might accumulate a collection of short films about different aspects of development that we could offer if the discussion seemed to suggest it. For example, a demonstration of the Brazelton newborn assessment scale could be offered within the context of a discussion and perhaps shown at the end of that program. Like-

wise, if parents wanted more specific information about some area of development we could make or buy a film to add to our audiovisual library. Of course, this kind of control by the audience will become more possible as the technology becomes more available.

Another idea that interests us might be called comparative development. Instead of following a set path from birth on up through the ages and stages, we would move back and forth in time with our interaction mini-dramas. If we were showing an interaction between a two year old and his mother we might compare this to a vignette showing a newborn, a six week old baby, or a five month old interacting with his or her mother. We could then consider what ingredients were the same and what had changed in the development of the child that made the interactions different.

Infant/parent interactions could serve as a reference point since infants take us back to so many of the basics in human interaction. They would illustrate such points as the difference in timing between adult and child. We could show the infant's length of attention, how long it takes for him to respond to some advance of his mother's, and what makes him turn away. This could serve as a way of illuminating toddler behavior and of understanding some of the conflicts that arise between parent and child.

As we work out these ideas and others, our guiding principal will be to convey information without using a

didactic format. We would like to create a learning environment where interaction would take place on all levels. Media would be responsive to the subject of child rearing. Parents would respond to media by learning to use them in ways that would express and pursue parental interests. And we would respond to parents by learning from them more about learning and teaching with modern technology.